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## SCHOOL GOVERNMENT

WHILE the problem of school government is one of the most important in the whole range of school life, it has received but little attention, comparatively, at the hands of educators. If our system of education has failed to reach its highest ideals in the past, our methods of school control have been at least as much to blame as our methods of instruction. Teachers have been so absorbed in their efforts to develop the intellectual life that they have too often neglected the cultivation of the motive powers. The brain has been taught to do its work well, but the will, the supreme endowment of mankind, has been left to work out its own salvation or destruction without direction or training.

Our free-school system was organized expressly to fit the youth of the land to discharge intelligently the duties of citizenship. It was believed by our forefathers, and with reason, that a free government could not be maintained in its integrity without the free school, which was accordingly organized and fostered with the expectation that it would become the corner stone of the great structure of American civilization.

We live in the midst of democratic institutions under a representative government, yet our schools, which are intended to fit the youth of the land to participate intelligently in the various functions of such institutions and government, are essentially undemocratic, and are controlled by a power which is non-representative and, in form at least, autocratic.

The citizens of a political community have a voice through their representatives in the formation and execution of the laws by which they are governed, but the citizens of the school community, for a school is a distinct community by itself, with the interests and latent possibilities, if not with all the functions of the larger community outside, are subjected to a control which

is the very antithesis of a democratic government. And yet men wonder that the rising generation is so poorly fitted to take up and discharge the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. How is it possible to escape the conclusion that political incompetency is the direct and logical outcome of such a condition of affairs?

It is to be noted, farther, that while methods of school government are perceptibly moderating in rigidity and severity, and are becoming liberalized so as to give more freedom of action and a wider range for the development of individual tendencies, the system itself is as yet unchanged in principle and essence. It is still autocratic, although the slave-driver's whip has given place to the gilded scepter.

This state of things cannot continue. Our civilization has reached the point where it demands, not the reformation of the old system, but its abolition, and the adoption of a radically different one. Already "Great Birnam wood is coming to high Dunsinane hill" and Macbeth's reign is ended.

The attention of the educational world is gradually but surely being attracted to this problem, and many attempts are being made to solve it. It is the purpose of this article to describe very briefly an experiment which is being tried in one of our larger high schools along the lines of what has been called, perhaps unfortunately, "Student Control," and which has been accompanied by some results which are interesting, and perhaps significant.

It should be said that the object of this movement is two-fold; to teach the pupils to discriminate between right and wrong in their relations to their mates and to the school, and to develop within them the will to do the right and shun the wrong; in other words to substitute a wise and intelligent self-control for a system of external government.

In the main building of the school in which the experiment is being tried more than a thousand pupils, young men and women, ranging from thirteen to twenty-one years of age, are seated in sixteen rooms, including a large assembly hall. The

remaining four hundred, who are seated in another building, have not as yet been included in the new system.

After a somewhat extended discussion of the whole subject with both teachers and students, which made all fairly familiar with the reasons for and motives of the new departure and engaged their more or less active interest, the initial step was taken last May, two months before the close of the year.

After a short trial some changes were found desirable in the details of the plan which is now in operation as follows: Each room elects in regular form a representative to a body, which is partly legislative and partly executive in its functions, called the senate. This body elects a president and secretary, appoints the necessary committees, and assumes control of the order in the halls and of the care of the furniture and building. It formulates a code of laws and appoints a corps of "tribunes" to carry them out. These laws are read to the students in each room, and carefully explained so that the reasons for their adoption and the methods of their enforcement are clearly understood, and then are posted in conspicuous places. Whenever classes are passing through the halls the tribunes are stationed in all the strategic points throughout the building to see that the rules are observed.

The senate also appoints a court of three judges, to whom all cases of law-breaking are reported; and before whom the more serious ones are tried with the customary procedure of prosecution and defense. These judges, very wisely, make their administration reformatory rather than punitive in its purposes, and seldom find it necessary to inflict a penalty.

This, in brief, is the outline of the organization, which is of interest only because of the results which it produces. It will be noticed that this scheme of government is distinctly a representative one, and that each pupil can justly feel that he is an integral part of the system. Moreover, the whole body of the students, with very few exceptions, are intensely loyal to the idea. They take pride in the recognition of their rights, and they also feel that they are individually responsible for the wel-

fare and the good name of the school. As a result of this the old spirit of a forced submission to authority is passing away, and in its place is coming a voluntary submission to the general rules of good behavior as embodied in the laws, which they themselves have made and adopted. And it is especially interesting to observe that these laws are stricter than those under which they lived during the old régime.

When the experiment was begun the senate was told explicitly, that for two months the designated functions of the school would be put unreservedly into their hands, and that neither principal nor teachers would interfere with their administration, either to hinder or to help. This announcement was made with some hesitation, but it was determined to give them an absolutely fair trial, and the result demonstrated the wisdom of the position.

The results, already manifest, are many and far-reaching. They penetrate every function of school life and influence all its relations. There is a better spirit displayed throughout the school and it is the general verdict of the teachers that never before has the control of the class rooms been so easy and it is certain that the number of cases of discipline referred to the principal has materially decreased.

Two important results are evident even to the casual observer. The first is that excellent order is maintained in the halls without any interposition on the part of either principal or teachers. From five to eight hundred students are required to change their rooms at the end of each period and frequently to go from the first to the second or third floor and the reverse. At every turn and on each of the landings stands a serious and dignified boy or girl, and the slightest disorder is promptly but courteously checked. There is no unseemly haste, no conversation or laughter, but each student goes quietly and promptly to his appointed room and the whole change is made in four minutes or less.

The second result is to be noted in the change of disposition. Under the old régime the absence of a teacher from his

post removed all visible restraint and frequently resulted in an outbreak of conversation and laughter, and by some it was even considered quite proper to evade the watchfulness of the teacher and to indulge in forbidden pleasures. The very fact that an arbitrary restraint is imposed upon a person by a superior authority, even though its reasonableness is recognized, will frequently arouse antagonism and inspire a spirit of rebellion. Under the new régime this attitude of mind is disappearing. There seems to be no difference in the general conduct even if no tribune is in sight, and I believe that the present order would be maintained, at least for a time, even if the whole corps of tribunes should be withdrawn. They can hardly be dispensed with, however, because they stand as representatives of the student-body, and are symbols of its authority. Their presence gives a new dignity to school citizenship and is a constant inspiration to everyone who passes by.

One question, which was seriously discussed and which many feared would prove an obstacle to the success of a new system, related to the attitude of a student towards an offender. Under a system of self-government would he be willing to give information, which should lead to the discovery of a law breaker, when that information should be given to the officers, whom he himself had helped to constitute. It was finally decided not to define an issue on this point, nor even to require the students to commit themselves in advance, but to keep still and let the matter take care of itself. And it has been observed with interest that up to the present time no student has refused to give his testimony in any case where the integrity of his institutions was at stake. In general such evidence has been given in a manly and womanly way and no stigma has attached to the witness. If this state of affairs becomes permanent it will prove a strong argument in behalf of the system.

Of course the adoption of this system does not constitute the desired revolution, but it must be expanded and adapted to meet all the contingencies of school life and still further experiments are being continuously tried. The next step has been

taken in connection with the senior class, who sit together in the assembly hall and number about 225. They have been selected both because they are the most serious and mature students in the school and because an exceptional opportunity for the development of this system is offered by the fact that they sit together in one room.

It is impossible as yet to speak definitely of results. The chief features of the organization may be gathered from the following extracts from the constitution, which was drawn up by a committee appointed by the class:

#### PREAMBLE

We, the students of the Hyde Park High School, sitting in the assembly hall, in order that we may secure training in free government, develop our powers of self-control, and more fully know our relations as individuals to society, do adopt and ordain this constitution as a basis for the student government of the assembly hall.

#### ARTICLE I. LEGISLATIVE

SECTION 1. All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a house of representatives under such restrictions as are herein made.

SEC. 2. The house of representatives shall be composed of representatives elected, one from each district, for a term of twelve school weeks, except as provided in section 3 of this article.

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SEC. 7. The house of representatives shall convene at 2:15 o'clock on the first Monday after the election of its first members, and every second Monday thereafter, and may continue in session as business may require.

SEC. 8. Special sessions may be held at the call of the president of assembly hall.

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SEC. 10. *Clause 1.* The house of representatives may provide that any bill, resolution, order, or other enactment which it may pass, shall be submitted to a popular vote of the students for approval or rejection, and a majority of the votes cast concerning such measure shall determine the result

*Clause 2.* If any measure so submitted shall be approved by the students, it shall take effect as provided, but if any measure so submitted shall not be approved by the students, it shall not have any force.

*Clause 3.* If within three school days after the passage of any bill, resolution, order, or other enactment, fifty students shall petition that such measure be submitted to a popular vote, it shall be so submitted.

*Clause 4.* The house of representatives shall provide for executing the provisions of this section.

SEC. 11. The house of representatives shall elect a clerk from the students of the assembly hall not members of itself, who shall serve for six school weeks, and whose duty it shall be to keep a record of the proceedings of the house of representatives, to safely keep all records and documents belonging to the student government of the assembly hall, and to file all laws and other enactments in an orderly manner.

SEC. 12. The house of representatives shall have power to organize its own committees and make its own rules; to compel the attendance and good behavior of its members by such rules and penalties as it may choose to adopt; to expel by a two-thirds vote of its members any representative whom it may deem to have proven unworthy of the office; to define and provide a penalty for all offenses against the students of the assembly hall; to provide for the general order and interests of the assembly hall; to make such laws and provisions as shall be necessary for exercising the powers herein granted, and for applying all other powers and provisions vested by this constitution in the student government of the assembly hall, or any department or officer thereof; to create and name such executive offices, subordinate to those herein provided for, as it may deem necessary; to organize them and provide for their regulation; to make laws for regulating the elections and determining the public will; to provide for the regulation of the board of chancellors, and for the procedure in all trials before it.

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## ARTICLE II. EXECUTIVE

SECTION 1. The executive powers herein granted shall be vested in a president, a supervisor of wardens, and a prosecuting attorney.

SEC. 2. The president shall be elected by popular vote from the students of the assembly hall for a term of eighteen school weeks.

SEC. 3. *Clause 1.* The president shall preside over the sessions of the house of representatives.

*Clause 2.* He shall have the general supervision of the executive department and shall see that the laws are faithfully enforced.

*Clause 3.* He shall have power to nominate, and with the consent of the house of representatives, to appoint the members of the board of chancellors, the supervisor of wardens, the prosecuting attorney and all other officers of the student government of the assembly hall whose appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and who shall be established by law; but the house of representatives may vest the appointment of such inferior officers as it may think best, in the president alone, in the board of chancellors, or in the head of any department.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Clause 5.* He shall have power to remove from office for incompetency or neglect of duty the supervisor of wardens, the prosecuting attorney, or any other officer of his appointment, except the members of the board of chancellors, whose removal is not otherwise provided for.

SEC. 4. *Clause 1.* The president or any member of the board of chancellors shall be subject to impeachment, by any twenty-five students sitting in the assembly hall, for neglect of duty or violation of the trust conferred in him.

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SEC. 5. *Clause 1.* The supervisor of wardens shall be appointed by the president, and shall hold office during good behavior and the term of the president.

*Clause 2.* It shall be his duty, with the assistance of his subordinates, to enforce the laws ; to apprehend offenders and bring them to trial before the board of chancellors ; to assist in the collection of evidence and otherwise promote the prosecution of offenders as the prosecuting attorney may require ; to execute such provisions as may be made for the general order and welfare of the assembly hall.

SEC. 6. *Clause 1.* The prosecuting attorney shall be appointed by the president, and shall hold office during good behavior and the term of the president.

*Clause 2.* It shall be his duty to look after the interests of the students of the assembly hall in all causes before the board of chancellors ; to see that all apprehended offenders are prosecuted ; to execute any provisions, orders or instructions which the house of representatives may entrust to him.

### ARTICLE III. JUDICIAL

SECTION 1. The judicial powers herein granted shall be vested in a board of chancellors, which shall consist of five members appointed by the president.

SEC. 2. Each member of the board of chancellors shall hold office during his good behavior.

SEC. 3. Three members of the board of chancellors shall sit at each and every judicial session as a court to try and determine all causes within the jurisdiction of this government.

SEC. 4. The member first appointed to the board of chancellors by the president as herein provided shall be the presiding chancellor and shall sit at all sessions of the board.

SEC. 5. Two members of the board of chancellors shall sit at each session of the board as associate chancellors.

SEC. 6. The sittings of the associate chancellors at the sessions of the board of chancellors shall be so apportioned by law that no associate chancellor shall sit at more than two consecutive sessions.

In order to show the sentiment of the school the following selections are copied from editorials which have appeared in the school paper, *The White and Blue*, and which have in no way been inspired by either principal or teachers :

Whatever else anyone may wish to add, all will probably concede that education is designed to prepare a person for his life's occupations and duties. In this country one important duty of every citizen is to take his place in the political organization. In view of this, those who are promoting the movement for student control, contend that the public school ought to include practical training in the affairs of the government as well as the study of the theory. Unfortunately for this contention some erroneous ideas have gotten into circulation. It does not mean, as some have inferred, that the student body has a right to manage its own discipline ; that the present form of government by the faculty, because it is autocratic, is unjust and an imposition upon the students. The relation of the faculty to the student is primarily that of trainers. Its object is to develop the powers that are within the student, and among these is the power of self-control, in the individual, or self-government when applied to society. So, just as the instructor aims, as far as possible, to draw from the student himself the conclusion which he wishes to present, and develop the student's power for independent thought, in like manner, student control purposes to teach by actual experience the precepts of government, and to develop in the student body, in the gymnasium of practice, the powers of self-government as society. It is yet a question for experience to answer, what is the period in the life of the student at which he is prepared to have the external restraining influences, which have directed his growth, removed, and to stand on his own resources and control his conduct by that which is within him.

At the close of this school year, Hyde Park ought to look back upon a fair test of student government, and, if its success reaches the point indicated for it, upon a suitable system adopted with a view to permanency. The trial of last term disclosed several helpful facts, and seemed to justify a gradual development of the plan. That experiment gave an opportunity for all parties to try the idea. The conclusion of most of the students and teachers was favorable, and their expectation is that we shall continue.

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There is a present duty, however, for everyone who has faith in the object of the movement and who hopes for its final triumph. He owes obedience to the rules and respect for the students' officials. The influence of his example is demanded on the side of order, and whatever force he can exert ought to be spent in clearing up any misunderstandings that may be held by those who are not acquainted with the purpose. It is expected, further, that everyone, whatever he may think of the merits of the idea, will

at least not hinder a fair trial, and will give the proposition the consideration which it deserves.

The belief in student control is becoming more and more recognized and emphasized, and today the educational world awaits with interest the conclusions that are to be drawn from the experiments now in operation in so many schools throughout the country.

"We have finally arrived at the conviction — although we have been tardy in reaching it,—" says President Edward G. Halle of the Board of Education, "that the child is an entity and not an incident," in the school life.

Truly such is the case. You and I are living as real a life in our intercourse at school today, as we possibly can when we have passed without its kindly portals.

It is only in learning how to control ourselves, to feel ourselves responsible for our own acts, that we can hope to elevate the citizenship of our country; and, if the schools teach but one thing to the youth of our land, let that thing be the appreciation of higher citizenship.

And this all important fact is to be taught through discipline; not the school discipline of fifty years ago, which enforced obedience to red-tape regulation of teachers and boards of education, by the dread of the birch rod, but by instilling into the mind of the student the true relation of discipline to our moral education.

Make the student feel that he is as much a part of the school as his teacher, as important to its existence and maintenance as its faculty, and you will awaken in him a feeling of intense interest for the school, its work, and success, and a true appreciation of the moral responsibilities of life.

Let the school be the laboratory, with student control as the apparatus for the scholar to perform his first experiments in moral development; for, if moral appreciation inspires moral practice, moral practice will assuredly beget moral appreciation.

In conclusion it only remains to be said that this experiment was undertaken with much doubt and with some hesitation, but with the firm conviction that some system of the kind must be adopted in the near future. The results, however, have far exceeded our expectations, if not our hopes, and the belief that the new departure, when wisely organized and fully developed would work an important revolution in school life, has become almost a certainty.

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